











“Functioning of a higher educational institution under force majeure circumstances: A case study of Ivan Franko National University of Lviv”

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SPECIAL ISSUE: ACADEMIC MANAGEMENT IN THE CONDITIONS OF WAR

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FUNCTIONING OF A HIGHER EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION UNDER FORCE MAJEURE CIRCUMSTANCES: A CASE STUDY OF IVAN FRANKO NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF LVIV

Abstract

Over the last decade, Ukrainian higher educational institutions have faced extraordinary and even dire circumstances three times: russia's attack on Ukraine in Donbas and occupation of Crimea (2014); a total lockdown caused by a pandemic due to the spread of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) (2020); russia's full-scale war against Ukraine (2022). Each time, Ukrainian higher educational institutions had to reformat the educational process to meet the challenges of the time.

Lviv region began accepting internally displaced people from Donbas and Crimea in 2014. In this regard, Ivan Franko National University of Lviv (Lviv University) has established itself as one of the regional leaders. The spread of the COVID-19 pandemic required the immediate organization of distance learning and, therefore, the improvement of information and technical support. russian crimes against humanity in 2022 caused an enormous wave of internal displacement of citizens. Employees and students of Lviv University have been helping internally displaced people with housing, food, and basic necessities since the beginning of the full-scale war; they have also assisted refugees at checkpoints along the Ukrainian-Polish border. Over a hundred University students and employees serve in the Armed Forces of Ukraine. Those who remain at home work hard to bring victory over the enemy closer. They are volunteering, fund-raising, arranging humanitarian aid, cooperating with international charitable organizations, etc.

Under difficult wartime conditions, the University's academic community continues to fulfil its primary mission: to provide modern, high-quality education.

Keywords

war, university, teachers, students, educational process,
refugees, volunteering

JEL Classification

I21, I29, H56

INTRODUCTION

Given the present-day emergencies, higher education in Ukraine urgently had to solve crucial tasks of educational process transformation so as to meet the students' need for profound knowledge and to enable the maximum possible provision of this need on the part of university teachers and staff. Realizing that educated youth is the state's future, representatives of the government and local self-government, together with the top management of educational institutions, do whatever they can to secure the continuity of the educational process and ensure high-quality education. This process is still characterized by a large number of problems, the territorial location of institutions

being one of the many. Some institutions have been forced to relocate to the territory controlled by Ukraine, others have to work close to the front line, and some are situated hundreds of kilometers from it. However, no matter where they are, they all are under the pressure of the war. Therefore, the paper aims to study the functioning of a higher educational institution under unpredictable conditions on the example of Ivan Franko National University of Lviv (from now on – Lviv University; the University), which is located on the western border of the state that defends itself against enemy invasion.

1. RESULTS

1.1. Ivan Franko National University of Lviv: 360 years of experience

Lviv University is a classic institution combining faithfulness to traditions and quick adaption of positive educational innovations. The University occupies a high position in international and Ukrainian rankings (Table A1, Appendix A).

The number of students studying at the University in the 2022/2023 academic year exceeds 22.5 thousand. At the beginning of 2023, the University staff counted 4,485 people, including 2,124 teachers and 344 Research and Development Department members, and 2,017 were administrative, maintenance, and educational support staff. The educational process is provided by 299 doctors of science and 1230 candidates of science (Ph.D.). Lviv University is one of the seven universities of Ukraine simultaneously included in two world university rankings: THE World University Rankings and QS World University Rankings (Ivan Franko National University of Lviv, 2023b).

The University received the 4th level of accreditation. It offers courses of studies for degrees on the three levels of higher education: bachelor's (first level), master's (second level) and the third, (educational and research/educational and creative) level.

Conventionally, three stages of the organization of LNU activities in emergencies can be distinguished. The first started in 2014 when families with children planning to get higher education began moving from the Anti-Terrorist Operation zone. It significantly increased the number of University applicants from the Donbas region in 2014–2015. These students needed individual approaches that were successfully elaborated by the University staff. The

COVID-19 pandemic (2020), marking the beginning of the second stage, made inevitable mixed and, in some periods, completely distance learning. This situation uncovered several problems, most of which related to technical support and some organizational difficulties. The third stage, the full-scale brutal Russian aggression of 2022, appeared the most difficult as a significant part of the Ukrainian territory was occupied; the war caused panic among citizens, and many people were internally displaced or became refugees.

1.2. Admission campaign at Lviv University in 2014

The military conflict in Donbas and the occupation of Crimea can be considered the first case of a force majeure for education in the history of independent Ukraine. The number of applicants from the regions of conflict increased significantly (Figure 1).

Furthermore, the number of applicants and student-residents from Donbas and neighboring regions wishing to transfer to Lviv University has also increased greatly since 2014.

1.3. The COVID-19 pandemic: peculiarities of educational process organization

Since 2020, Lviv University, like the rest of Ukraine, has been in a state of emergency due to the lockdown, forcing the urgent implementation of distance and mixed learning. This situation was preceded by the mass closing of international connections (international airports, border checkpoints), the cancellation of large-scale events, forced self-isolation, and the implementation of quarantines in various institutions, including nurseries, schools, higher education institutions, and other institutions where employees could or

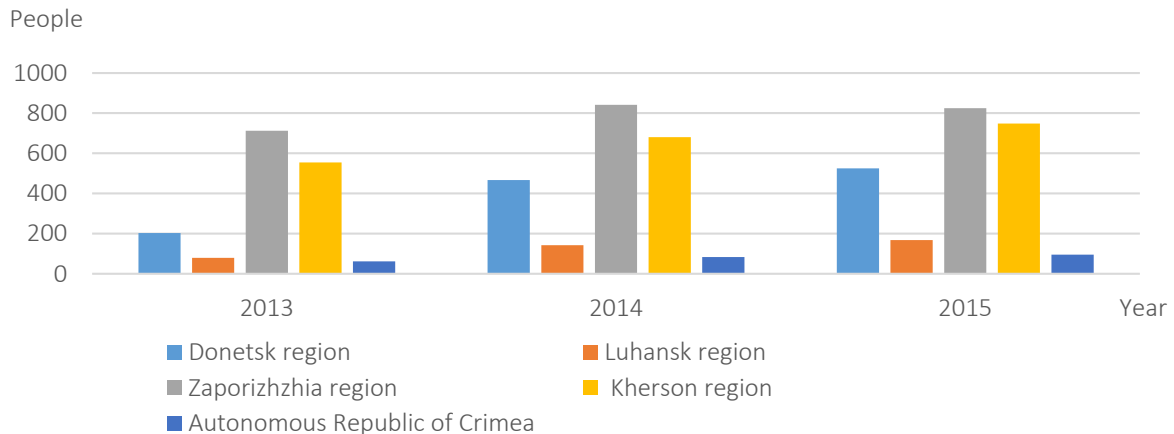


Figure 1. Number of applicants from territories close to the Anti-Terrorist Operation zone in 2013–2015

ganize their work at home. The COVID-19 pandemic, which threatened the health and lives of students and teachers, was the impetus for the lockdown. On July 22, 2020, the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine passed the Resolution regulating the quarantine restrictions during the COVID-19 epidemic (Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, 2020).

The Distance Learning Regulation was approved by Ukraine's Ministry of Education and Science in 2013. Depending on the situation, the Regulation was implemented by a decision of the educational institution's Academic Council (from now on – the Regulation) (The Parliament of Ukraine, 2020). Because of the pandemic, Ivan Franko National University of Lviv immediately organized online learning on the Microsoft Teams platform. Before the MS Teams platform became operational, the educational process remained uninterrupted despite coming across many problems, most significant among them being technical support issues, namely, the lack of necessary equipment, quality access to the Internet, etc. The online communication between lecturers and students was held on Zoom, Skype, and other platforms. In 2020 the Center for Network Technologies and IT Support of Lviv University launched the Microsoft Teams Teamwork Center.

There are currently over 500 e-mail subscribers on the University network, 26 departments, divisions, and laboratories work in dial-up mode directly in the INTERNET network (PPP protocol), 29 local computer networks (approx. 2000 workstations) provide for direct work in the Internet network

according to the TCP/IP protocol (Ivan Franko National University of Lviv, 2022).

The educational process in distance learning is organized using the “Dekanat” information system.

Since individual and mass training differs in requirements to approaches and technical support, some changes were introduced to the Regulation in 2020. There was offline, later distance, and mixed learning during the 2020/2021 academic year. In the 2021/2022 academic year, the offline mode had to be changed for online learning. The online educational process made adjustments to the work of structural subdivisions:

- schedules were made regarding both online and offline modes (with platforms and links to the classes obligatory indicated);
- credits, semester, and state examinations were held offline;
- over 7,500 students of the University took educational and pedagogical apprenticeships using distance learning technologies.

Considering the difficult situation in Ukraine and Lviv region and following the recommendations of the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, semester tests and exams, final attestations, and defenses of qualification works, state exams are held online (synchronously) according to the schedule on distance learning platforms (Zoom). The Internet service Microsoft Office

365 (Microsoft Teams) ensures reliable authentication of examinees owing to video communication. A student's registration and personal identification are accomplished through their electronic mailbox.

1.4. russia's large-scale invasion of Ukraine

After the introduction of martial law on February 24, 2022, all steps for organizing online learning appeared highly relevant. Sixty-two students transferred to Lviv University from hostilities-affected higher educational institutions, and 144 students were renewed for studies. To avoid a break in education, the University took steps to improve the effectiveness of distance learning. Lviv University has started free reintegration training courses to prepare young people from temporarily occupied territories, including the temporarily occupied Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol, for admission to the University. The number of applicants for the master's program from Kyiv, Kharkiv, Kherson, and Khmelnytskyi regions has increased immensely – 455 people. In the 2022/2023 academic year, the educational process is organized in a mixed (on-/offline) format: mixed (on-/offline) learning for Bachelor's degree students; distance learning for Master's degree students.

Lviv University is in the top three in Ukraine regarding the number of applications submitted for education, proving the University's competitiveness and popularity with applicants. The brutal russian aggression did not affect the number of students seeking degrees from Lviv University.

The number of entrants has slightly changed due to the war that caused the appearance of a considerable number of refugees and displaced people (Figure 2).

The University administration provided housing and material assistance to all students who were forced to flee the war zone; fellow students organized the collection of money, basic necessities, and products.

Even under martial law (starting in 2022), there are about 1% of international students at Lviv University. Nearly all of them wish to complete their higher education at the University and are now enrolled in distance learning. The same applies to about 10% of Ukrainian students who left their country shortly after the armed assault began. Most refugee students have returned to Ukraine after the Armed Forces of Ukraine valiantly repelled the enemy for several months. Many students joined the volunteers and now work at refugee reception centers, railway, bus stations, and border checkpoints between Ukraine and the European Union.

Over a hundred university staff and students enlisted in the Armed Forces of Ukraine and Territorial Defense. Human casualties are a constant result of military confrontations; regrettably, there are already losses among University staff and students. As the University keeps jobs for the mobilized employees, the administration urgently had to find replacements for temporarily vacant positions. The problem was quickly solved, and the quality of the educational process remained unaffected.

Following the order of the Ministry of Education and Science "On some issues of organizing the work of vocational pre-university and higher educational in-

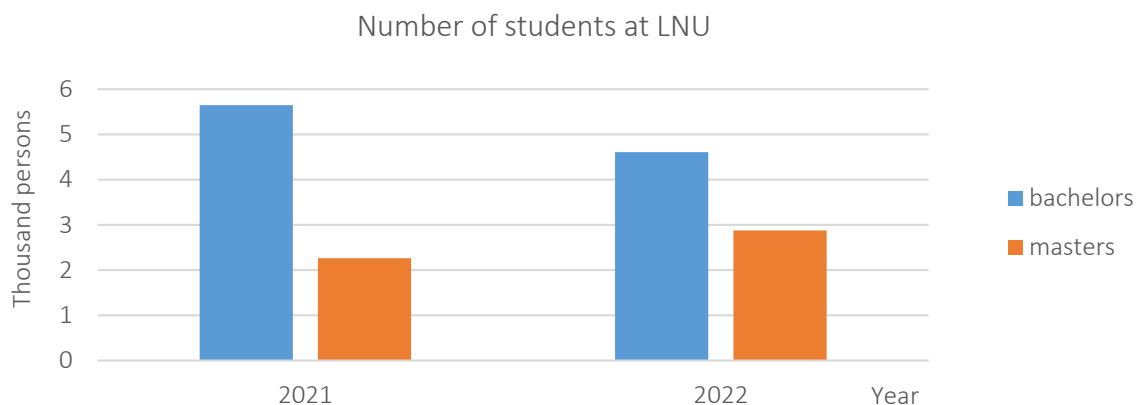


Figure 2. Number of students enrolled in 2021 and 2022

stitutions during martial law” (dated March 7, 2022, No. 235), the institutional framework was developed to ensure the safety of students, staff, and participants in the educational process, the preservation of educational institutions’ property, the implementation of evacuation procedures as needed, and the organization of special study conditions (providing individual schedules, academic leave, etc.) for students serving in the Armed Forces, Territorial Defense Units, or volunteering (Informational and analytical collection, 2022).

Lviv University quickly responded to the urgent need to equip shelters where students and teachers could stay safe during air raids. Today, there are shelters in all buildings of the University; the premises are equipped with everything necessary: water, heating, and led light. There is also Wi-Fi available in some shelter rooms.

The enemy’s missile attacks on civilian infrastructure severely harmed the nation’s energy facilities, caused power outages, and thus created problems in the educational process. Nonetheless, damages were swiftly rectified, and the lessons resumed according to the approved schedule.

Some University students and employees find adjusting to the force majeure situations difficult. The Trade Union Committee of University Employees and the Psychology Service of Lviv University jointly performed a series of training “Security of the educational process in the conditions of martial law” to help participants develop the abilities needed in martial law situations.

The University has developed a Center for Monitoring the Educational Process in Wartime Circumstances, which processes and helps resolve student appeals reporting difficulties or conflict situations during distance learning.

1.5. Civic position

The war encouraged people to reveal their civic position.

The world academic community supports Lviv University in a difficult situation. The University of L’Aquila (Italy) was the first to offer help. “InterMaths and MathMods Alumni Association”,

Lares Italia, and Lions Club L’Aquila organized two batches of medicines, and the University of L’Aquila transferred these medicines to Ukraine. The Italians brought the next batch to the Ukrainian border during the UnivAQ for Ukraine mission. Medicines were sent to the military, civilians, and hospitals in the east of Ukraine in the shortest possible time. In addition to medicines, baby food, and baby hygiene products were also handed over. The aid went, in particular, to Kramatorsk, Kyiv, Kyiv region, Mykolaiv, Zaporizhzhia, Zaporizhzhia region, Chernihiv and others. On March 3, 2022, the “InterMaths and MathMods Alumni Association” launched a collection of donations for the Ukrainian population, which continues up to this day; the funds are directed to purchasing necessary goods and medicines (InterMaths, 2022).

As part of the University of Jena initiative, Lviv University received financial assistance of over UAH 600,000 for organization and technical support of a high-quality educational process for students. The initiative to raise funds for the needs of the University was inspired by Professor Joachim von Puttkammer, director of “Imre Kertesz Kolleg”, professor of the Institute of History of Friedrich Schiller University, and coordinator of the project “Invisible University for Ukraine”. Professor Puttkammer visited Lviv in October 2022, met with students, discussed with them their organizational and technical requirements in the difficult circumstances of obtaining education during the war, and after returning to Germany, together with the Society of Friends and Patrons of the University of Jena, initiated raising funds to support the educational process at Lviv University (Ivan Franko National University of Lviv, 2023a).

The University students’ trade union committee sent hundreds of appeals to the world’s leading universities, scientific institutions, and student organizations with a request to take a clear position on supporting Ukraine and increasing pressure on Russia; they also sent an appeal letter to the international academic community with a call to isolate Russian science. The world public noticed such activity. The American chemist, winner of the Nobel Prize in Chemistry in 1981, Doctor Honoris Causa of Ivan Franko National University of Lviv (since 2015), Roald Hoffman, initiated a letter sup-

porting Ukrainians' resistance to the Russian aggressors. 163 Nobel laureates signed the letter (Vox Ukraine, 2022).

In the most acute period (the beginning of the aggression, a huge number of internally displaced people), students worked on the hotline to support people who suffered from military actions in Ukraine. Students and lecturers provided translation/interpreting assistance to refugees.

In June 2022, the Student Council of Lviv University started a charitable blood donation campaign, "Ukrainian Blood," calling on colleagues from other universities to join the charity donation. The Student Council collects gifts for soldiers undergoing treatment in Lviv medical institutions.

Students and employees raised funds to purchase goods and food for soldiers (only one col-

lection was almost UAH 3 million), Territorial Defense of the combat zone regions, repair combat equipment, and support university students who suffered from enemy shelling. They make so-called "trench candles" and camouflage nets, goodies for the military (homemade pastries, food, etc.). The University student and teaching staff organize the delivery of various materials from foreign charitable organizations; arrange charity parties and auctions. They initiated charitable projects under the motto "Stand with Ukraine" (2023), "Ukrainian Scholars at Risk Fund", "Book. Help. Victory", and cultural and entertainment events involving internally displaced people.

There are invincibility stations and the headquarters of humanitarian aid on the premises of Lviv University, where displaced students receive things and food.

CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of the paper was to study the functioning of a higher educational institution under force majeure, using the example of Ivan Franko National University of Lviv. It has been stated that the occupation and annexation of Crimea did not seriously affect the University's activities. The pandemic led to the need to organize mixed and/or distance learning. This stage seemed difficult in terms of technical support and quarantine requirements. Since February 2022, with the beginning of a full-scale war, the University staff and students have had to make great efforts to keep the educational process uninterrupted and to ensure its quality at the pre-war level. The main challenges were: a large number of internally displaced people and refugees, the increasing number of students and university applicants from the combat zone, the urgent need to provide them with necessities, organization of the educational process under the conditions of missile attacks and air raids, urgent demand of appropriate shelter, etc. The situation deteriorated due to a general decline in living standards, inflation, and the destruction of civil infrastructure. Psychological adaptation became especially important in the conditions of martial law. Today, almost all problematic issues are gradually resolved because fellows, professors, and students of the University demonstrate their firm civic position and patriotism, confirmed by volunteering and various activities aimed at defeating the enemy.

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Validation: Andrii Stasyshyn, Olha Hrabovetska.

Visualization: Inna Kulish, Olha Hrabovetska.

Writing – original draft: Inna Kulish, Halyna Kaplenko.

Writing – review & editing: Halyna Kaplenko, Olha Hrabovetska, Viktoriia Dubyk.

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APPENDIX A

Table A1. Main indicators of Lviv University in 2012–2022

Indicator	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Total number of students (people), including	22,117	21,041	18,989	20,234	20,235	20,201	19,800	21,335	22,156	23,249	24,333
Foreign students (people)	62	70	95	96	105	132	241	277	302	334	211
The number of students enrolled at the University (people)	9,298	8,978	8,565	7,678	6,616	6,977	7,282	7,135	7,393	7,824	7,487
The number of employees, including (people)	4,117	4,103	4,079	4,060	4,475	4,849	4,479	4,401	4,358	4,485	4,200
Teaching staff (people), including	2,016	2,002	2,036	1,899	2,052	1,886	1,894	1,922	2,029	2,124	1,978
Male (people)	779	763	751	760	789	741	734	776	804	839	752
Female (people)	1,237	1,239	1,285	1,139	1,176	1,145	1,160	1,194	1,225	1,285	1,226